

TESTIMONY OF NICK WILEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FLORIDA FISH AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION COMMISSION, BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY, SUBCOMMITTEE ON INVESTIGATIONS AND OVERSIGHT ON THE SCIENCE OF HOW HUNTING ASSISTS SPECIES CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

June 19, 2012

Good afternoon Chairman Broun, Ranking Member Tonko, and Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today to provide testimony to the Subcommittee regarding *the science of how hunting assists species conservation and management.*

My remarks today will be from the viewpoint of state fish and wildlife agencies. State fish and wildlife agencies have primary responsibility for managing the wildlife that resides within the states. We have shared responsibilities with federal agencies for migratory wildlife that cross state and international boundaries or reside on federal lands. State fish and wildlife agencies enjoy a long-standing and highly successful partnership with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service in providing scientifically managed, sustainable hunting for our citizens across the nation.

Hunting is an enduring feature of American history, culture, and heritage. Any person who cares about wildlife, whether they hunt or not, should be thankful to America's hunters for the generous and steadfast support they have provided for wildlife conservation since the early 1900's. The record is abundantly clear that hunters have been the first and foremost advocates to pay for wildlife conservation and science based wildlife management. They contribute hundreds of millions of dollars each year through excise taxes on firearms, ammo, and archery equipment, license and permit fees, and donations to conservation organizations. This "hunter conservationist" system is fundamental to the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation and a major reason game species are thriving in every state today.

Since the early 1900's, state agencies have utilized funding from hunters to invest heavily in the scientific management of wildlife, employing highly trained, professional wildlife biologists. Universities, federal agencies and conservation organizations also contribute significantly to the wildlife science utilized by state agencies. All of this technical expertise provides a powerful scientific foundation for wildlife management. As a result, population dynamics and habitat requirements of hunted wildlife species are generally well studied. This information, in concert with science-based data collection, analyses and monitoring, sustain our very successful hunting and conservation programs.

Game management has been defined as the art and science of applying the principles of wildlife management to achieve a balance between the needs of wildlife and the needs of people. The fact that populations of game species annually

produce a harvestable surplus is the basis for the biological theory underpinning the capacity for hunting. This harvestable surplus depends on how well a species of game survives and reproduces, in addition to the availability and condition of its habitat. Professional biologists apply various tools to collect the scientific data that defines this harvestable surplus and ensures that game populations continue to thrive. These tools include surveys that assess animal populations and annual harvest rates; studies where animals are marked with radio collars or leg bands; and direct surveys of hunters. In the hands of professional wildlife biologists, these tools can measure size and trends in populations, reproductive success, mortality factors, harvest levels, and hunting pressure. Hunters frequently play a key role in supplying this information and generally are enthusiastic about helping provide the data needed to ensure species conservation and the sustainability of hunting. This is another important way that hunters support wildlife conservation and contribute to its success.

After analyzing the biological and social information, agency biologists develop recommendations for the structure of hunting opportunities such as season dates, bag limits, or permit quotas. In most states, these recommendations are presented to a governing body, often a commission or legislature. These decision-making bodies rely on the fact that recommendations from agencies are based on sound science as they also thoughtfully consider input from the public in establishing hunting regulations.

I would like to wrap up by referencing a success story from my home state of Florida that illustrates the inextricable links between hunting, science, and wildlife conservation. In 1967, the American alligator was listed as an endangered species because of unregulated market hunting. Today alligators are abundant throughout Florida, providing plentiful hunting opportunities. This remarkable recovery is largely due to effective and exemplary science-based regulation and management. Public hunting of alligators has been allowed in Florida since 1988, and total harvests now average more than 20,000 per year. License and permit fees paid by alligator hunters provide the funding for the science and management that insures sustainable alligator management programs. Moreover, Florida's economy benefits by more than \$14 million dollars annually as a result of alligator harvests and associated industry.

This example illustrates how conservation and management decisions have been driven by reliable science and as a result, are effective and well supported by the public. Looking forward, I am confident that hunters will continue to be the best advocates for science based wildlife management, habitat conservation and sound public policy. And in doing so, they will continue to ensure our wildlife resources are strong and healthy, public access to wildlife is guaranteed, and future generations of Americans will enjoy a rich legacy of hunting across all 50 states. Thank you.